

## *Feline Diabetes*

**Feline diabetes** is becoming more common in our pet cats. Diabetes mellitus is a disease characterized by a deficiency or inadequate response to the hormone insulin resulting in increased levels of glucose in the blood. Diabetes isn't a curable disease but with good care cats with diabetes can live long and happy lives.

**The cells** in your cat's body all need a constant source of glucose, a simple sugar produced from food and found in the blood, to produce energy. Without the presence of adequate amounts of a hormone produced by the pancreas called insulin, glucose can't pass from the blood into the cells and be used to produce energy. Insulin acts like a key and opens channels in the wall of the cells to allow the glucose to enter where it can then be used to produce energy.

**Some cats** don't produce enough insulin to supply the cells in their body or in some cases their cells may become resistant to the effects of the insulin that they do produce. This resistance is often due to obesity. When a cat is obese the excess fat is telling its body that it has plenty of energy and the cells don't produce as many of the channels needed to allow the glucose to move from the blood into the cells. When the glucose can't enter the cells it begins to build up in the blood. An abnormally elevated blood glucose level is called hyperglycemia and this is one of the signs your veterinarian will look for when trying to diagnose and manage diabetes in your cat. In response to this hyperglycemia the cat's pancreas will try to produce more insulin and eventually this can cause the pancreas to "burn out" and then it is no longer able to produce any insulin. At this point it becomes necessary to give your cat injections of insulin so the glucose can enter the cells and be used in energy production.

**Feline diabetes** has some characteristic signs that can assist your veterinarian in diagnosis. The most common signs are a dramatic increase in thirst, an increase in urination and an increase in appetite. Even though uncontrolled diabetics are eating more they are also losing weight because they can't utilize the energy they are consuming without adequate amounts of insulin. A diabetic cat may also have a poor looking hair coat due to reduced self-grooming and occasionally weakness in the hind legs.

**With proper** treatment these signs can often be controlled allowing your diabetic cat to live a long and happy life. Treatment options for feline diabetes include diet modifications, insulin injections and occasionally oral medications. Your veterinarian will work with you and your cat to determine an effective treatment to control your cat's diabetes. Proper diet can be a vital factor in controlling diabetes in your cat. Your veterinarian can advise you of a proper diet. Most diabetic cats will require insulin injections as part of their therapy. Many cat owners are initially concerned when told

they will need to give their cat daily insulin injections. Most soon find however, that the injections are painless and other than the inconvenience of following a structured schedule of feeding and insulin administration, this is a small price to pay for keeping their cat healthy and happy.

**There are** several options when choosing an insulin for your cat. Some veterinarians prefer human insulins that are available from a pharmacy. Currently, there are 2 insulin products that have been FDA approved for cats. One of these is Vetsulin<sup>®</sup> which is an intermediate-acting insulin approved for use in dogs and cats. Recently ProZinc<sup>®</sup>, a new long-acting insulin created specifically for cats has become available.

**It may** take several adjustments in your cat's insulin dose until your veterinarian finds the amount that works best for your cat. You will probably see improvements in your cat's clinical signs even before the ideal insulin dose is determined. Generally your veterinarian will start with a low dose to avoid a potentially serious side effect of insulin administration called hypoglycemia. Hypoglycemia is a condition where the glucose levels in the blood are too low. This usually occurs because your cat has received too much insulin but it can also be a result of your cat not eating enough food or excessive exercise. Signs of hypoglycemia can be weakness, depression, a staggering or abnormal walk, unusual behavior, muscle twitching, seizures, and in severe cases, coma. Watch your cat closely for signs of hypoglycemia and if suspected contact your veterinarian immediately and try to get your cat to eat. If your cat won't eat or is unable to eat rub corn syrup or honey on your cat's gums until it is alert enough to be hand fed then seek veterinary help immediately. Don't administer any more insulin to your cat if you suspect hypoglycemia until you have spoken to your veterinarian.

**Feline diabetes** is a very treatable condition. Choosing to treat your diabetic cat can allow you the opportunity to spend many more happy years with your pet as well as develop an even closer bond. If you would like more information on feline diabetes ask your veterinarian or go to [www.mycathasdiabetes.com](http://www.mycathasdiabetes.com).

**Brad Francke, DVM**  
Professional Services Veterinarian  
Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica, Inc.

